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THE FEDS / By Jeff Steir

The Trenchcoats

The morning after the Republican election victory, Louis Wolf went to work as usual in the National Press Building, a few blocks from the White House. Bleary-eyed from the long election night, Wolf bought coffee at the take-out counter in the lobby and, with an armload of newspapers, slipped into the elevator crowded with reporters for the five-floor ride to his office.

By four o'clock that afternoon, the slim 40-year-old man began pasting strips of copy on layout sheets for his publication. On the strips were names—names of Central Intelligence Agency undercover officers in American embassies around the world.

Lou Wolf has been exposing the identities of CIA agents for about five years now. He and his associates—Washington, D.C., attorney William Schaap and filmmaker Ellen Ray—have, with the help of renegade former CIA agent Philip Agee, ripped the cover off more than 2,000 officers in the pages of their journal, *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, and in two books: *Dirty Work I: the CIA in Western Europe* and *Dirty Work II: the CIA in Africa*.

The CIA, and now the Congress, has labeled these four people everything from traitors to Russian agents. But for the past five years, legislation to put them out of business has been stymied by a wobbly congressional concern for the First Amendment and by revelations during the '70s of CIA misdeeds—dossiers on American citizens, assassination attempts, the set-up of the coup in Chile.

But now, times have changed. On the congressional docket is the Intelligence Identities Protection Act, which would make it a crime punishable by three years in jail and a \$10,000 fine to publish the names of CIA personnel, even if the information has been gathered from public sources.

Prospects for the bill's passage were



Clockwise from left: Bill Schaap, Louis Wolf and Ellen Ray

favorable even in last year's Democrat-controlled Congress. They have been advanced immeasurably by the November defeat of half a dozen key liberals and by the rantings of groups like the Heritage Foundation, demanding that Congress act on "domestic terrorists." The bill's probable passage this year will set the stage for a classic First Amendment showdown with unpredictable results. In the months ahead, the Intelligence Identities Protection Act and the constitutional issues raised by it—just what *can* journalists reveal about the CIA—may prove an important indicator of the Reagan administration's real interest in restricting free speech and progressive political debate.

Bill Schaap put it succinctly: "For more than a year now, we've been saying to the press that there's no such thing as a bill against us and not against you." And as Schaap has pointed out again and again, there are clearly unconstitutional aspects to the act. Under the legislation, it would be illegal not only to publish the names of CIA personnel gathered from public

"Yeah," responded Ted Kennedy, his eyes fixed on the text of the legislation. The bill stalled after passing the committee and will have to be reintroduced in the current session of Congress.

When "getting Agee" or "getting" *Covert Action Information Bulletin* becomes the task, when it is paramount to pass legislation aimed not at restricting government information but at restricting publication of information about uncomfortable realities, then

we are faced with a constitutional threat on a new scale.

The CIA has been gritting its teeth over *Covert Action Information Bulletin* (and its predecessor, *Counterspy*, a publication which continues under different management) for years, trying unsuccessfully through a series of propaganda maneuvers to rustle up widespread support for jailing its editors. The problems for the journal began with the murder of Richard Welch.

In December 1975, official Washington, and especially the intelligence community, was in a tumult. Nixon had been toppled. The Church Committee, the Rockefeller Commission and the press were dragging CIA skeletons out of the closet one by one: Cuba; the Congo; Chile; Brazil; Guatemala; and Operations Phoenix, MK-ULTRA and CHAOS. Assassination attempts, drug testing, mail openings, break-ins. CIA efforts to move covertly into Angola were thwarted by intelligence agency critics.